

# Associate Editor's Report

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Two issues dominate the winter *Forum*. On the one hand, the massive reelection of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela prompts an analysis of what his Bolivarian revolution means. Seldom in the last 25 years have we found a more divisive issue in Latin America. The Cuban and Sandinista revolutions enjoyed initial consensus, but there was gradual disaffection as the years went by. This has not been the case with Chávez. From his initial rise to power, the populist nature of his rhetoric has led many to question his intentions. Nevertheless, an important segment of the academic community has been supportive from the start, and has kept a close eye on developments in Venezuela. The LASA *Forum* editorial team felt that it was time to put many of these issues on the table and gather a wide spectrum of academic opinion regarding the achievements, and/or failures, of the Chávez administration.

The other issue is LASA's decision to move its next International Congress to Canada. In the wake of this decision, there has been rising interest in non-Latin American and non-U.S. centers or programs in Latin American Studies, primarily Canadian centers. "Peripheral" Latin American programs were examined at the Puerto Rico Congress, where LASA President Sonia Alvarez asked Jeffrey Lesser of Emory University to organize a roundtable on this topic. The result was "Centering the Periphery: Non-Latin Latin Americanisms." Four scholars were asked to reflect on the epistemologies emerging from a de-centered geopolitical approach to Latin American Studies. In this issue we publish the results of this discussion.

Regarding the debate on Chávez, the first essay, "Countervailing Powers" by Greg Grandin, argues that Chávez's opponents have always accused him of incompetence, corruption, and authoritarianism. Grandin

proposes to explore those points to gauge Chávez's accomplishments. Arguing that the chaotic energy of his administration is due to a lack of ideological rigidity, Grandin sees efficiency where his critics see incompetence. He also claims that corruption is endemic to the Venezuelan state, though serious efforts to curb it have been implemented in recent years. He concludes by stating that Chavismo has its shortcomings, but that its achievements clearly outweigh its flaws. Greg Grandin is Professor of History and Director of Graduate Studies at New York University.

In a second article, "A View from the Barrios: Hugo Chávez as an Expression of Urban Popular Movements," Sujatha Fernandes argues that both supporters and detractors of Chávez attribute "a high degree of agency" to him yet they fail to fully appreciate the impact of popular social sectors in shaping his agenda. Fernandes argues that "while academics lumped together these diverse groupings as 'Chavistas...' many community organizations... did not identify as Chavistas. Rather, they have alternative sources of identity ...." By looking at "the interconnections, alliances, and points of collaboration between critical movements and the state," she concludes that the relationship between them and the state is reciprocal. This makes Venezuela more participatory and inclusive than countries often touted as successful democracies. Sujatha Fernandes is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Queens College, CUNY.

Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold's "Social Spending and Democracy: The Case of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela," argues that "under Chávez, political competition has increased, but institutions of accountability have weakened. This mix helps explain how Chávez has chosen to spend Venezuela's spectacular oil bonanza." They argue that

there are different forms of social spending, and that Chávez exploits his *misiones* for political advantage, concluding that Chávez's social policies are not necessarily pro-poor, but "vintage clientelism and cronyism," although the *misiones* have been useful politically for Chávez's cause. Javier Corrales is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Amherst College. Michael Penfold is Associate Professor at the Institute for Advanced Administrative Studies in Caracas, Venezuela.

Francisco Rodríguez begins his article, "Sharing the Oil Wealth? Appraising the Effects of Venezuela's Social Programs," by stating that it is common to assume that Chávez has reoriented the economy to benefit Venezuela's poor. Claiming that "a rigorous evaluation of the administration's social programs is required for an understanding of the evolution of well-being among the poorest sectors of Venezuelan society," he concludes that *Misión Robinson* was both a failure and an expensive endeavor. He asserts that there is little evidence that state expenditures have been redirected to the poor, or that the administration is even trying to help them. Francisco Rodríguez is Assistant Professor of Economics and Latin American Studies at Wesleyan University.

Finally, in her article "Venezuela After the 2006 Elections," Jennifer McCoy asks a crucial question: "can a democratic framework manage a renegotiation of the social contract as citizens demand fuller inclusion and expanded citizenship in all of its dimensions?" McCoy sees the threat of violence when all three dimensions—civil, political and social—are present, leading to the rise of "a neopopulist or charismatic outsider variant of either electoral democracy or electoral authoritarianism;" even so, she remains moderately hopeful about Venezuela's democratic possibilities.

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Jennifer McCoy is Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University and Director of the Americas Program at the Carter Center.

For the *On the Profession* section, Víctor Armony offers a tour of Montréal's universities in "Los Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe en Montréal." In this *recorrido*, he covers McGill University, Concordia University, l'Université de Montréal, y l' Université du Québec à Montréal, outlining their Latin American centers, their achievements, the number of Latin American students in those institutions, and other details, such as the CDAS, where the *Latin American Research Review* will be housed. Víctor Armony is Professeur Titulaire du Departament de Sociologie de l'Université du Québec à Montréal.

Jeffrey Lesser's "Centering the Periphery: Non-Latin Latin Americanisms" is really four articles in one. It includes J. M. Baud's "Ambivalent Academia: Latin and Anglo-Saxon Influences in Latin American Studies in Europe;" "Waiting for a Second Humboldt: Latin American Studies in Germany" by Barbara Potthast; "The Antipodal Passion" by Shuhei Hosokawa; and "Re-Discovering the 'Hidden' History of Latin American Jews" by Raanan Rein.

Michiel Baud notes the major Latin Americanist trends in Europe, with emphasis on the Netherlands, claiming that geopolitical dissimilarity is the main difference between European and American Latin Americanists. Baud runs the Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, the Netherlands. Barbara Potthast writes about the difficulties of pursuing Latin American research in present-day Germany in the eroding state universities. She teaches at the University of Cologne, Germany. Shuhei Hosokawa

discusses the question of translation as crucial for understanding the globalized yet asymmetrical relationship in Latin American Studies. Shuhei Hosokawa is at the International Center for Japanese Studies. Finally, Raanan Rein talks about how general Latin American studies are growing in Israel at the same time that traditional study of Jews "with its ideological and Zionist bias," is declining. Raanan Rein teaches at Tel Aviv University.

This section also includes a short guide to other programs in Latin American Studies in Canada by Rosario Gómez, outlining those at the University of Toronto, the Indigenous Studies Minor Program at the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University's Latin American Studies Program, and the Latin American program at the University of Saskatchewan. Rosario Gómez is Assistant Professor at the School of Languages and Literatures of the University of Guelph.

Finally, the *Political Commentary* section includes an article on the official report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission by Charles Walker, Professor History at the University of California, Davis. Professor Davis argues that, while praised for its rigor, the report has been criticized by wide-ranging sectors of Peruvian society. The consequence is that, despite debunking the myth that Fujimori defeated terrorism, no political sector has embraced it. As a result, there is even a risk that it will no longer be available for public consultation after 2007. ■